NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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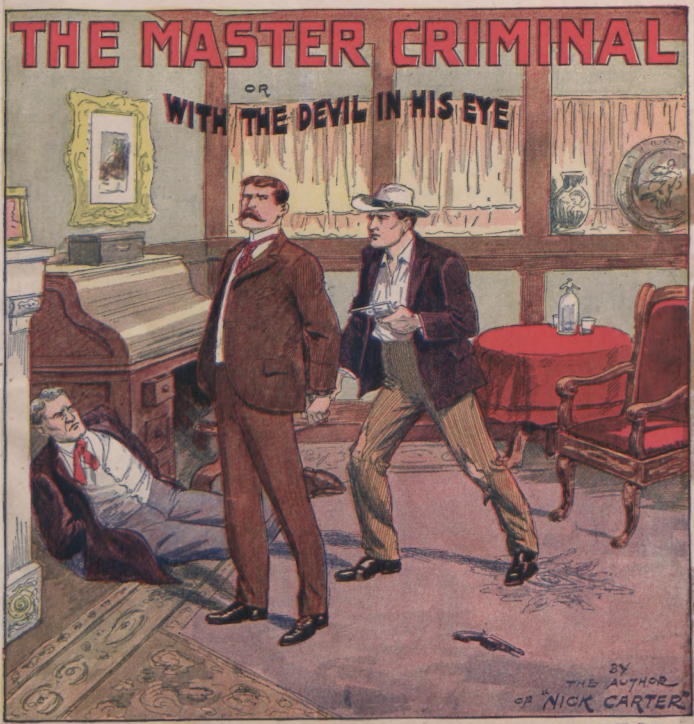
No. 408. Price, Five Cents.

THE MASTER CRIMINAL

OR

WITH THE DEVIL IN HIS EYE



"So!" said Nick Carter to the master criminal. "That is right. Are your hands more comfortable?" Both were securely handcuffed, Meadows lying in a helpless heap on the floor.

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THE MASTER CRIMINAL;

OR,

With the Devil in His Eye.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING DOING.

"I have noticed, inspector, that a man who enters a bank for the purpose of drawing money out of it, inevitably arranges his pockets, or pats one of them significantly, when he is in the act of leaving the building, while on the other hand, a man who enters a bank for the purpose of depositing money there, leaves the building with his arms swinging at his sides."

Nick Carter smiled as he made this statement, for the substance of it was so patent to both men that it seemed hardly necessary to make it at all.

Nevertheless, the inspector replied, seriously:

"That is quite true; but what has that to do with the case in hand?"

Instead of replying to the question, Nick continued as if it had not been asked:

"And I have noticed, also, that when a smart crook seeks to fool or deceive men like you and me, he always works by contraries."

"Well?"

"Well, to you! Don't you think the rule will hold good in other matters as well as in the particular case of a bank?"

"I see no reason why it should not."

"Nor I. You regard Paul Lafont as the best shadow on the force, do you not?"

"I certainly do."

"So do I. Now, how long has he been on the track of Carruthers?"

"Something over a week. About ten days, I think. I can readily tell by glancing at the assignment book."

"Never mind that. The point is, what has he discovered?"

"Nothing."

"He has discovered that every day at a certain hour, Carruthers goes to a certain house on Boston Road, in the Bronx; that he enters the house with his hands swinging at his sides, and that he leaves it, after an hour spent there, with his hands in his pockets."

"Exactly. Well, what do you make out of that?"

"Simply that he knows he is shadowed; that he takes something to that house and leaves it there. That is all."

"Does that knowledge get us any nearer to the truth than we are without it?"

"I think it does."

"Very well. Tell me what you make of it and perhaps we can get our heads together. I know the people of the under world rather well, but I will confess that Carruthers has succeeded in puzzling me, and I have about made up my mind that we have been chasing a wild goose."

"Not on your life, inspector. In the first place I know the Carruthers family pretty well. You will remember that I had a government case once—a smuggling case, in which the brother of this man was involved. He was the slickest rascal I ever had anything to do with in the whole course of my professional career. This fellow, Morris Carruthers, is almost as slick an individual as his brother, Livingstone. We know that Isaac Meadows and Morris Carruthers were pals and chums, while Meadows was president of the Midland Bank."

"Yes; we know that all right."

"And we are rather positive that Morris Carruthers did the bribing which enabled Isaac Meadows to escape, the next morning after his arrest."*

"That is true enough, too."

"And we have supposed that, by shadowing Carruthers, we would sooner or later be led to Meadows so that we could rearrest him."

"What are you getting at, Nick?"

"This: That there is some means of communication between the house in Boston Road and the hiding place of Meadows; and that the means of communication, whatever it is, is so perfectly concealed that Carruthers has no fears that we will discover it."

"Lafont has searched the house twice, and Maguire and Mullen have searched it together, once."

"And they found nothing."

"Not a thing."

"All the same, George, I am going to search it myself to-night."

"Good! I'm glad of that. You have been so infernally busy of late that I couldn't ask you to take up this matter; and——"

"And besides, you had every confidence that Lafont could do it."

"Why, yes. As a matter of fact, I had."

"And he could do it, too, if it were anybody besides Carruthers with whom he had to deal, but I want to tell you that that man is smarter than greased lightning."

"I'll grant you that."

"I believe that he has known from the very first day that Lafont was on his track."

"I think he is aware of the fact now, at all events."

"You bet your life he is! What is more, he has been laughing in his sleeve all the time."

"At Lafont?"

"Sure, at Lafont; and at you; and at me as well. Has it occurred to you, inspector, that we do not even

*See No. 407 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Bank President's Plot."

know that Carruthers is a crook? That we only surmise it?"

"No; I won't admit that. We know it, but we can't prove it."

"Well, either way, it amounts to the same thing."

"Let us go over the facts of the case together for a moment. It will refresh our memories, perhaps."

"All right. You state the case as it stands. I'll see if you leave anything out."

"Very well. The Midland Bank was robbed of three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The watchman was killed and his body was thrown into the river. The policeman on the beat, Mullen, was severely injured, although he is now back again at work, and for his services in that matter you had him transferred to your own department."

"Correct so far. Go on."

"We found that the robbery was committed by two English crooks who were admitted to the bank, and to the safe where the money had been placed, by Isaac Meadows, the president of the bank."

"Yes."

"And we discovered that Isaac Meadows was an old-time crook, who had been known in the past as Lucky Morgan—that he had inherited a fortune from his father and had established himself in the banking business. We arrested him here in this room—your private office."*

"That we did."

"And the very next morning he gave us the slip—or rather gave your men the slip, by bribing two officers to let him go. You have since caught the men who were bribed, but you haven't caught Meadows."

"We want him for the robbery, and also for the murder of the watchman, Pike."

"Yes; and——"

"Wait just a moment. I haven't quite finished."

"Well, go ahead."

"We thought we were doing a wise thing in keeping the exposure of the whole thing out of the morning papers, that morning. Both cashiers asked us to do so, and we consented. The result was that as soon as he was free, he coolly and boldly went to the bank—before business hours had begun in that part of the city—was admitted without question by the new watchman whom he had himself engaged the preceding day, and he calmly helped himself to everything he could lay his hands on in the way of cash—a cold fifty-five thousand dollars—and coolly walked out again and disappeared. Is that the case?"

"Almost. You haven't mentioned Carruthers."

"No; because we don't know anything about Carruthers. We only surmise."

"Well, it's a pretty good surmise."

"Granted; but it isn't knowledge. All we have to go upon is the meager description of a watchman who is more than ordinarily stupid. He describes the man who waited outside the bank for Meadows, but he describes him so poorly that we can only guess that it was Carruthers. We don't know that it was."

"We are morally certain of it."

"Certainly. I am positive of it in my own mind, and so are you; but we can't prove it."

"We will prove it."

"Well, I should say we would. But there is only one way to do it, inspector."

"How is that?"

"You have got to call off your men. Tell them the case is over and done and set them at something else, so they will forget it; and then, I've got to give my whole time and attention to it."

"That is what I wanted you to do from the first."

"And that is what I could not do from the first, as you know; but I'll do it now. Lafont is a good man,

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*See No. 407 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Bank President's Plot."

but he might as well wear a uniform when he shadows Carruthers, so far as following him without being caught at it is concerned. Carruthers is altogether too fly a chap for Lafont."

"Look out that he doesn't prove too fly for you, also."

"I haven't done any shadow work for a long time, inspector. I have left all that to my assistants—Chick, Patsy and Ten-Ichi, so I think I will rather enjoy the excitement of it."

"Don't you suppose that Carruthers knows you will be after him?"

"Of course he knows it. He thinks I am after him now, and that is the only thing that has bothered him—because he has not been able to get any trace of me on his track. He thinks I am somewhere in the background, and it bothers him because he has not been able to tell where I was or am."

"When do you intend to begin operations?"

"At once. When Lafont telephones in to you today, order him back to the office. Just call him off and leave the rest to me."

"Consider it done, Nick. You just want me and my men to keep hands off; is that it?"

"That is it exactly. I'll take Mr. Morris Carruthers' track this afternoon, and if I don't run him to earth, and his partner, Meadows, also, I'll quit the business. I don't think it will be a long job, either. And now that we understand each other, I'll get to work and have something doing."

CHAPTER II.

CARRUTHERS, THE INSOLENT.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when the conversation above recorded took place between Nick Carter and the inspector—almost time for Lafont to telephone in his report to the inspector, for it was his habit to perform that duty at six each evening.

It was not the detective's intention to begin the actual work of shadowing, that afternoon, but rather to wait till the following day, for he intended to devote that particular night to a thorough search of the house in the Bronx, of which mention has already been made.

He did not think it necessary to call up the inspector again that evening, to ascertain if Lafont had been called off the service, for he knew the inspector would recall the man the moment he telephoned.

Nevertheless he regretted afterward that he had not done so, for he would have been much better prepared for what was to happen had he known that Lafont, for the first time in his career, so far as his superiors knew, had failed to report at the appointed time.

At the central office, the inspector waited till seven o'clock for the expected report, and then, as he had heard nothing from Lafont, he decided that the shadow had been kept away from an opportunity to call him up by some exigency of the case, and that he would hear from him later. So he told the man whom he left in command during his absence from the office to tell Lafont, when he should report, to return to duty at the office, and he went home for the night.

When Nick Carter left headquarters he also went directly to his own home.

In his own private study he sat in the big chair near the window for a long time, pondering over what disguise he would assume, for he realized thoroughly that he now had to do with a man who came nearer to being his own match in every art of his profession than any other he had ever known.

"Carruthers will see through almost any disguise I can assume," he murmured to himself. "His brother, Livingstone, was smart, Heaven knows, but this fellow is smarter still. Livingstone knew me in almost every disguise I could assume, and he also knew me without any disguise; but I don't think that Morris ever saw me without a disguise on. I'll try it that way.

won't wear any disguise at all, to begin with, and see how that works."

Nevertheless, before he went out, he donned a reversible suit of clothes, and he supplied the concealed pockets it contained plentifully with everything he might chance to require in the work he had to do; wigs, grease paints, etc., etc., until he felt that he was prepared for any emergency.

Next he attached his two "spring-pistols" inside his sleeves.

These were short weapons of undoubted accuracy, and of thirty-eight caliber. They were so arranged that the detective, by a certain motion of either arm, could throw one of them into his hand, discharge it, and by releasing it, allow it to return up his sleeve so quickly that the eye could not discover that he had held a weapon.

He appeared, with them, literally to shoot from the ends of his fingers, and at a distance of thirty paces he could drive a nail with either weapon—or, rather, five nails, for each one contained five bullets.

In addition to these he supplied himself with the usual weapons which he always carried in his pockets, and at nine o'clock that night he started out.

It had been the habit of Carruthers, according to the reports of Lafont, to visit the house on Boston Road, at or near five o'clock each afternoon, and to remain there about an hour, after which he returned to the city, and busied himself as any other "man about town" might have done—that is, he visited his clubs, the hotel lobbies, a theater, or sought congenial companionship among his card-playing friends.

Sometime during the night he always brought up at his own apartment—bachelor apartments they were—at the Undine, where he had a suit of four rooms, and where he lived sumptuously and at considerable expense.

From his rooms he rarely appeared before midday, and frequently was not seen at all till late in the afternoon, when he took up the regular round of his habits.

Such was Morris Carruthers, the known friend and confidant of Isaac Meadows, otherwise "Lucky Morgan," and such, as far as was known, were his habits.

He had never been known—that is, since the time when Lafont had been placed on his track—to visit the house in the Bronx after the hour of six, just as he had not been known to go there before the hour of five.

The house itself, as already stated, had been searched three times—twice by Lafont and once by two of the inspector's men, Maguire and Mullen.

It was untenanted, although it was in all respects prepared for living purposes. It was comfortably, if not elegantly, furnished, from top to bottom.

There was nothing to distinguish it, outside or in, from other houses, save that it stood quite alone in the middle of a large lot, now overgrown with weeds, and otherwise bearing mute evidence of desertion and neglect.

To this house Nick Carter repaired as soon as he departed from his own home.

It was ten o'clock when he arrived, and he paused outside the gate for a moment, in order to ascertain if there were prying eyes about which might see him enter the premises.

Satisfied that he was unobserved, he entered the grounds and approached the front door.

Ordinary locks were as nothing to Nick Carter, who always carried with him a delicate little instrument of his own invention which he called a "pick-lock," and with which he could supply the want of almost any pattern of key, simply by adjusting it to his purposes by a few deft touches here and there.

A glance at the lock on the front door demonstrated what he required, and in less than two minutes after he

reached the porch the door swung open before him, and he entered the dark hallway.

There, for an instant, he paused while he touched the button of his little electric searchlight, and shot the rays from it around the region immediately in front of him.

There was nothing to be seen save the ordinary hall furniture, so he pressed the spring to keep the light burning, and then closed and locked the door behind him.

"If I am as thorough as I intend to be," he murmured to himself, "this will be pretty near to an all-night job. There must be something in this house besides furniture, and unless I am greatly mistaken in Carruthers—and I don't think I am—he has a double purpose in coming here. One of those purposes is to perform some service, or some duty, which he cannot well perform in any other place, and the other is to throw us off the scent. All right, Mr. Carruthers," he added, aloud, "I'll pit my wit against yours any time."

"Indeed!" remarked a calm, but mocking voice immediately behind him; "that is most kind of you."

Nick wheeled like lightning, and the gun in his left sleeve flew into his grasp as if by magic, while with his right hand he cast the ray of the light he carried full into the face of the man who had spoken.

What he saw was a handsome, smiling, careless countenance.

It belonged to a tall, magnificently proportioned man upon whom any person would have looked twice in passing. He had large, laughing, blue eyes that were almost effeminate in their beauty, although it must not be supposed that there was anything effeminate about the man himself, for he bore the unmistakable stamp of courage and daring.

A long, yellow mustache, perfect in shape, drooped from his upper lip so that it concealed the sinister lines of his mouth, and transformed that feature into smiling attractiveness.

He was broad-shouldered, deep-chested, tall and muscular, and he carried himself with a grace and lithesomeness which bespoke wonderful agility and strength.

"Put away your weapon, Mr. Carter," he said, with easy insolence; "for I suppose you are Mr. Carter, are you not?"

"I suppose I am," replied Nick.

"Then let me persuade you to put away your pistol. It might go off without your intending it, you know, and—really—you are not in the slightest danger here dontcherknow."

"Really?" said Nick. "I'll take you at your word especially since I know that I am not. You are Morris Carruthers, eh?"

"I enjoy that distinction; yes."

"You know I can't see you very plainly in this light," added the detective.

"No? Then let us have another, and more of it, by all means. You know, Carter, if you had only sent word that you were coming I would have had the place illuminated in your honor; I really would."

"Kind of you," muttered Nick.

"Kind? Not at all, I assure you. Merely a recognition of your abilities as a housebreaker. Really, Carter, you ought to give up the detective business, and go in for burglary. You would be superb; you really would."

"Thanks, awfully; but I think you are even better adapted to that calling than I am."

"Do you, now? I wouldn't have thought it. But you will admit, Carter, that—er—nobody but a thief, or a—er—double-dyed scoundrel, would walk into a gentleman's house in the way you have done to-night."

"Or a detective who was in search of a double-dye

scoundrel," rejoined Nick. "You make me think of your brother, Livingstone."

"Do I? Really? How kind of you! How doubly kind of you to remember him at all. Shall we have that light now?"

"If you are ready to strike it," replied Nick.

"My dear Carter, I live, at the present moment, only and solely for the purpose of gratifying your whims."

"Thanks," said Nick, shortly.

"And," added Carruthers, turning away and passing through a door into the parlor of the house, "if only one of them is the desire to be thrown out of the house after your visit is done, I shall be happy to gratify that one also."

Nick shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

An instant later Carruthers raised his right hand and turned on the light of an incandescent burner in the chandelier over his head.

"You see," he said, as he turned again and faced the detective, "you need not have troubled yourself to have brought your electricity with you. I have it here on tap. There are lights like this one in every room in the house, and they are all at your disposal. They are really. Didn't your good friends, Lafont and Maguire, and Mullen, inform you of their presence? How thoughtless of them! How very thoughtless! Eh, Carter?"

CHAPTER III.

THE MASTER CRIMINAL.

"You are as alike as two peas," said Nick, dropping into a chair, and fixing his keen eyes upon Carruthers.

"As like as whom?" asked Carruthers.

"Your late lamented brother, Livingstone."

"You have already referred to that fact once, I believe," remarked Carruthers, with a dangerous glint in his eyes, which, however, remained there for an instant only.

"As alike as can be," continued the detective, in a musing tone, more as if he were communing with himself than addressing another. "Both tall, both handsome——"

"Don't mention it, I beg of you."

"Both insolent. Both athletic——"

"As you shall presently discover when this visitation of yours is at an end."

"Both shrewd and sharp. Both witty; and both, alas, as great scoundrels as ever went unhung."

"Really, Carter, you overpower me. You do, really. Can you think of nothing else in which we resemble each other?"

"Yes; one more thing, but that is to come."

"Tell me what it is, I beg of you."

"I think I will leave that to the future. Your brother thought he could get the best of Nick Carter, and that little self-deception on his part ended by costing him his life. I will not be surprised if you will be alike in the fates which overtake you."

"Carter," said Carruthers, slowly, "there are some things which anger me. They are few I own; but there are some, and one of them is the subject upon which you now seem to wish to linger. I will say this much for your benefit, and it is not like me to say it, either, but somehow I feel it is my duty to do so."

"Say it, by all means, then."

"I have never forgotten that my brother's death was due to you—and I have never forgiven it, and never shall. Is that enough?"

"Oh, no. Don't hesitate to proceed for fear that you may hurt my feelings or disturb my sleep. You were saying——"

"Ah, yes. What was I saying? Something which you may possibly translate into a threat?"

"A threat?" said Nick, yawning.

"I should hope not," replied Carruthers. "Who would dare to threaten the great and only Nicholas

Carter to his face? Who would presume to pit himself against such an indomitable man? Who would have the temerity to suppose that he could overcome the wonderful little giant whose reputation is world-wide? Really, Carter, you are too modest."

"You are not troubled in that way, at all events," responded Nick.

"With modesty? No? Well, you are right. And now, if you think we have been sufficiently complimentary to each other, would you mind informing me to what circumstance I owe the honor of this call?"

"I came to search the house," replied Nick, boldly.

"Indeed! For what, if I may ask?"

"For anything which I might find."

"Ah! Like any common burglar, eh?"

"If you feel disposed to put it that way—yes."

"If you should tell me what you really hoped to find, it may be that I can assist you in the search, Carter. Were you looking, perhaps, for the mines of Golconda?"

"No; but for traces of your friend, Meadows."

"Really? For Meadows? Poor fellow! Even in his retirement you must intrude upon him. But surely you did not expect to find him here, did you?"

"I expected to find traces of him."

"And likewise, no doubt, of the fifty-five thousand dollars he took from the bank the morning of his escape."

"Yes; likewise."

"Carter, did anybody ever have the kindness to tell you what an awful ass you are?"

"Never seriously. I have known those who put up a bluff about it—just as you are doing now, but—well, it was the sort of bluff which never worked."

"You mean that you never believed them; eh?"

"Just that."

"If you wished to search the house, why did you not do it in the honest way?"

"What do you call the honest way?"

"Why, get out a search warrant, and all that."

"I didn't think it necessary."

"No? Really? I say, Carter?"

"Well, what?"

"Suppose I had felt inclined to do as I really had right to do when I found you in my house just now?"

"You mean to shoot me?"

"Yes. I had a perfect right to treat you as a common burglar, and shoot you in the back, if I had felt so disposed. You know that. Really, Carter, I am surprised that I did not do it. I really am."

"Are you? I am not."

"No? Why?"

"Well, for one thing, it would have proved inconvenient for you. You see, Carruthers, the inspector knew that I was coming here. He might have asked annoying questions if I hadn't shown up in the morning."

"Pish, my dear Carter, pish! He might have asked all the questions he cared to; a jury would have acquitted me without leaving their seats."

"Then why didn't you do it?"

"I scarcely know," replied Carruthers, softly. "To tell you the plain truth, I am surprised that I did not. You see, I have promised myself that I will be the end of you some day, just to square that little account of my brother's. I fear I will never have such a chance again."

"Possibly not."

"And to think that I had my gun on you, and my finger on the trigger, all the time you were standing there. Really, I am surprised at myself."

"I can tell you why you did not shoot, if you would like to know," said Nick, coolly.

"Good! Tell me, for I confess that I am puzzled myself."

"You were afraid."

"Afraid? Really? You don't say so? Afraid! Well, that is something new in my experience. I don't remember ever having been afraid of anything, or of the consequences of anything; and you tell me that it was fear which held my hand. Really, Carter, you are nothing if not original. But to return to the business of the moment. When do you propose searching the house? Shall you do it now, and shall I assist you?"

"I can do it better alone, if you happen to have an engagement which calls you elsewhere," replied Nick.

"What! Would you have me go away and leave an honored guest here, unattended? Really, Carter, you surprise me. You do, indeed!"

"I can do the searching better alone."

"Without me to assist you?"

"Yes; without you to assist me."

"You are hardly complimentary, Carter."

"No? I will reserve my compliments for you till another time."

"Till when, for instance?"

"Till I see you on the inner side of grated bars."

Carruthers threw back his head and indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Gad, Carter," he said, "but there are times when you are really funny, d'ontcherknow. Why, to do that thing you have only to step outside and look at me through the basement windows, and that is the nearest you will ever come to seeing me behind the bars, if that is what you mean. Come, if you wish to make that search, let's get at it."

"When I make it," replied Nick, "I shall make it alone, as I intended to do when I came here to-night."

"But you know, Carter, much as I esteem you, I can hardly be expected to grant your request and leave you here alone. I can't, really."

"It will be much the easiest way, Carruthers, for I shall remain here now until you go away, if it takes all summer."

"Will you, really? How provoking! I suppose I might step outside and call a policeman and have you taken in custody, but I hesitate to do that."

"Do it by all means, if you think it would avail you at all."

"No; on second thought, I don't suppose it would. Seriously, Carter, I would like to ask you a question or two."

"Ask them."

"Why have you thought it wise to have my footsteps dogged for the last ten days? What have I done to merit such treatment as that?"

"It is not what you have done, but what you might do, in which I have been chiefly interested."

"Really? What I might do? Come. I like that. Did you expect me, perhaps, to break into a citizen's house, as you have done to-night?"

"No."

"Have you and the inspector decided that I am a criminal?"

"Oh, yes. We decided that point long ago."

"How interesting! Can you tell me in what manner I have transgressed the law?"

"No; I wish I could. I'd take you back to headquarters with me to-night."

"Would you, now? Say, Carter, do you happen to be alone here now?"

"I appear to be alone, don't I?"

"Yes, certainly; but you know how deceiving appearances sometimes are."

"Well, suppose that I am alone; what then?"

"Only this: If I were positive that you were alone, I would—but then, I am not sure."

"You may be, for I am alone."

Carruthers rose slowly to his feet.

"Really, Carter," he drawled, "you are a great fool

to say so, for that being the case, I shall give myself a little exercise, and throw you out of the house. I hope you won't be hurt in the scuffle; I do, really."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CARRUTHERS PUZZLE.

Nick Carter did not move from his chair when Carruthers arose.

"Sit down, Carruthers," he said. "Don't boast."

Carruthers came close to the chair in which the detective was seated, and pausing there, folded his arms and looked down upon him.

"Will you go?" he asked, "or shall I make good my boast, as you call it, and throw you out? Really, you know, it is immaterial to me which you select to do, save only that I shall lose the exercise if you choose the easier way."

"I shall remain where I am, Carruthers," replied Nick, as mildly, "and while you know as well as I know, that you couldn't throw one side of me out of the house, I don't choose to have any private exhibition of athletics here to-night."

"Oh! Don't you, indeed?"

"No, I do not."

"Suppose I should elect to attack you where you sit? I could leap upon you now before you could rise to defend yourself. Suppose I should do that?"

"You would get a bullet through your kneepan before you could get three feet nearer to me than you are now."

"Would I? Really? How interesting!"

Carruthers unfolded his arms and dropped them to his sides, while Nick watched him narrowly, for he plainly saw that the man meant to make some move, though what it was he could not as yet determine.

He permitted his hands to hang loosely at his sides for an instant, and then he placed them behind him, so that he stood in the attitude of a boy who is reciting his lessons in school.

"I suppose," said Nick, "that you made that double motion of unfolding your arms and then placing them behind you, in order to get your hands near the place where you have a revolver concealed. Take my advice and don't draw it, Carruthers."

"Why not, pray?"

Nick's only reply was an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

He was still seated in the chair, in the same negligent attitude, as if he had no thought of an attack of any kind, but his keen eyes were narrowly watching every move, and every detail of movement on the part of Carruthers.

As for Carruthers, he seemed to stand without motion; and so perfectly were his muscles in training that he could move his hands and wrists behind him without betraying the fact that they were in motion; that is, without betraying the fact to an ordinary observer; but Nick Carter knew perfectly well what he was about.

He knew that Carruthers' fingers were working nearer and nearer to his revolver, and that as soon as he considered the right instant had arrived, he would draw like lightning, and doubtless fire as quickly.

Nevertheless, the detective remained motionless in the chair, and for the space of a full minute neither man uttered a word.

"Well, Carruthers," said Nick, at last, "don't you think you had better return to your chair and be comfortable? That must be an uneasy attitude you have assumed, and although you now have your fingers on the butt of your pistol, it won't do you any good. You will only hurt yourself if you draw; not me."

"What an exceedingly interesting person you are to be sure, Carter," drawled Carruthers.

Then, with a suddenness which would have de-

ng and anyone less on the alert than the detective, he
lled his hand from behind him, and by a quick, under
ve, caught to bring the muzzle of the weapon it
ld into line with the body of the detective.

But the hand had scarcely moved—it had hardly
ome into view from behind his own body—and the
zzle of the pistol was still aimed at the floor because
f
e had had no time to raise it, when from the depths of
he chair in which the detective was seated there came
flash and a sharp report.

Carruthers uttered a curse and leaped into the air,
ackward.

The pistol he had held in his hand flew from his
rasp as if it had been struck out of his possession by
bludgeon—and Nick Carter still sat deep down in his
hair, apparently weaponless, and to all appearance
unarmed.

The revolver which Carruthers had held in his hand
ew to the opposite side of the room, struck against
e wall and then fell to the floor, and Carruthers him-
elf, after that one leap backward, and that one curse
e had uttered when Nick's bullet struck his own
weapon, instantly controlled himself.

He halted in the middle of the floor and smiled with
all his old *sang froid*.

Then he raised his hand to the level of his eyes, ex-
amined it critically for a moment, and dropped it again,
still smiling, for he saw that the bullet had not touched
it.

"Really, Carter," he said, with a smile, "you are the
most surprising chap I ever saw. And that was a
good shot, too. Almost as good as I could do myself.
It is lucky that you hit the pistol instead of my hand,
isn't it now?"

"I meant to hit the pistol, and not your hand," re-
plied Nick.

"Tshaw, Carter, don't lie about it! What's the use?
It was a fairly good shot anyway; and it saved your
purpose, for it disarmed me. And, by the way, I o
you an apology."

"Several, I think," said Nick, dryly.

"I am afraid I swore. That is always in bad taste
I hope you'll overlook it. I do, really. Shall I—er—
pick up my pistol, or do you think it will do comfort-
ably where it is?"

"Bette leave it where it is," said Nick.

"Oh, very well. Would you mind telling me where
you keep that one of yours?"

"What one?"

"The one—er—you just fired, dontcherknow."

"Oh, I keep that where it will do the most good."

"Up your sleeve, eh?"

"No; in my boot leg. Now, Carruthers, I have al-
most got through fooling with you. If you don't want
that kneepan broken—I think I referred to it a moment
ago—you'll resume that chair just behind you."

"Certainly, Carter, certainly. Anything to oblige,
you know."

"That's better."

Nick left his own chair as Carruthers took his seat,
and he drew a pair of steel handcuffs from one of his
pockets.

"I won't put these on you, Carruthers," he said.
"I'll let you do that little service yourself, but wear
them you must, for a little while—unless you choose
to get out of the house and leave me here in full pos-
session."

Carruthers looked at the handcuffs and then at Nick.

He could see that the detective was no longer to be
trifled with, and so he chose the easier course.

"It is mighty considerate of you, Carter," he said.
"It is, really, but if it is all the same to you, I think
I'll get out. I have just remembered an important
engagement I have 'way downtown."

"Get out by all means. I don't want you here."

"And—er—if it is not asking too much, when do

you think you will be through with your examination of the premises?"

"Oh, about daylight."

"You know where I live, Carter? At the Undine."

"Certainly."

"How convenient! I was only going to say that if you should happen to want me for anything, you will find me there any time after midnight, and up to noon to-morrow."

Nick shrugged his shoulders, and Carruthers moved toward the door.

At the threshold he paused an instant.

"I hope you won't run off with any of the furniture," he said. "There is none here that is of any very great value. So sorry to leave you all alone. There's a bottle of claret and some crackers and cheese in the sideboard downstairs, if you should happen to get hungry."

Nick made no reply and Carruthers passed to the outside door, where he halted again.

"I say, Carter," he said, "if by any chance you should happen to find that fifty-five thousand dollars, or any part of it, I hope you'll do the square thing and divvy; eh, Carter?"

With that parting remark he opened the door, passed out, closed it behind him, and was gone.

Left alone in the house, Nick did not longer delay the duty which had brought him there.

He was more than ever convinced—by the presence of Carruthers and by his evident reluctance to leave—that there was something to be discovered there.

Nor could he determine satisfactorily in his own mind, how it happened that Carruthers was there at that hour.

According to the reports received from Lafont, he had never before been at that house at or near that hour, and that he should happen to be there at the very time which Nick had selected for his own visitation surprised him.

"Nobody save the inspector and myself knew of my intention, and we discussed it in the privacy of his office," was his mental comment, "so the news of my intention could not possibly have leaked out. I must conclude, therefore, that it was an accident that he was here—that is, an accident so far as Lafont is concerned. As a matter of fact, it is more than likely that he has been in the habit of giving Lafont the slip every night, and returning here after Lafont supposed he was in bed, or engaged in a game of cards somewhere."

But Nick did not know that Lafont had not, even yet, reported at the central office.

The house, notwithstanding the fact that it stood quite alone in the middle of a large lot, was built on the plan of most New York houses; that is to say, with a hall on one side of it, ending in a back parlor, and with the hall on the second floor ending at a bathroom.

On the first floor there was a long saloon parlor and a back parlor. On the second floor there were two large rooms—the front one with an alcove—and a bathroom. On the third floor there were four rooms; that is, two large rooms, front and back, with closet between them, and two hall rooms, one front and the other rear.

The basement was like the basements of most city houses, devoted to dining room with corresponding pantries, and the kitchen.

Nick made a hasty general survey of the premises and at last paused in front of the door which communicated with the cellar stairs.

"Down there is where the secret lies, if secret there be," he said, aloud. "Down there is where I must search for a solution of the Carruthers puzzle, and there is one here, as surely as I am here at this moment."

CHAPTER V.

A NARROW ESCAPE FOR MEADOWS.

The advantage of the incandescent lights which Carruthers had shown the detective did not exist below the basement, and therefore Nick again had recourse to his pocket searchlight.

His first entrance to the cellar was marked by nothing different from the appearance of cellars in general, and yet he had the feeling within him—a presentiment, some people call it—that he was on the point of an important discovery.

His first discovery was that the cellar had been constantly visited.

There were tracks on the stairs which showed that much, and this fact alone was sufficient to convince him that he was on the right track, for the cellar was absolutely devoid of the presence of things which might have induced visitors to the house to visit it. There was neither food nor drink stored there. There was, in short, nothing to call any person to that part of the structure.

But the handle on the door at the top of the stairs, the appearance of the door itself, the stairway, the floor of the cellar at the foot of the stairs, and lastly, the air of the cellar, all gave mute evidence that some person or persons were in the habit of descending those stairs.

Still, when he had made the circuit of the place once, he had discovered nothing.

That first time, however, was merely a cursory examination, made to get his bearings, and to determine in his mind how best to make the search.

He returned then to the place of starting, and commenced the second round.

This time he proceeded with greater care, and also very much slower.

The point of beginning was near the foot of the stairs, and he had almost made the circuit—that is, he had traversed the entire circumference of the cellar and had arrived at the point directly beneath the stairway, before he made any discovery at all, and then it was apparently a worthless one.

It was nothing more nor less than the ends of two wires protruding from the mason work, upon which his glance rested.

But those two wires meant much to the detective.

They explained at a glance how it was that Carruthers managed to communicate with some other person from the inside of that house.

"As simple as the nose on my face," muttered the detective, smiling at the ends of the wires as if they were old friends whom he had unexpectedly met in that dingy and gloomy cellar.

He bent nearer and examined them more closely, and when he straightened up again, he turned away and ascended the stairs as if he had discovered all he cared to.

"Somewhere in this house I will find a telephone, with receiver and transmitter and battery, hidden away," he mused. "It is a very simple thing, when Carruthers desires to talk to his friend, to carry the instrument to the cellar, attach it, and then to proceed to business. It is very clever, too. I wonder that I didn't think of it before I discovered the ends of those wires. Still one cannot be expected to think of everything."

He began at the parlor and searched diligently to the top of the house, without result.

He left no spot or place unsearched, where a telephone instrument might have been concealed, and yet he discovered not the slightest sign of one.

Then he returned to the parlor.

For several moments he stood in the middle of the floor, going over in his mind every foot of the space he had searched, and endeavoring to determine what

part he had left unexamined, and what parts he had slighted.

He had turned on the lights again, of course, and while he stood there thinking, his eyes wandered toward the big Davenport which stood against the side wall of the house.

"Ha!" he said, "there is a spot which I have not searched at all; and the receptacle under the davenport seat is the very place of all others where Carruthers would be most likely to keep the telephone."

He crossed the room with rapid strides and raised the seat from its place.

Then he uttered a little exclamation of delight, for exposed to his view was the instrument for which he had been searching.

The telephone was before him; just such a telephone as you can see any day hanging against the wall of an office in the city.

The detective took it from its place, closed down the seat of the davenport, and with the instrument in his grasp descended again to the cellar.

There was a small bench near the place where the wires protruded from the wall, and upon this Nick placed the telephone, noticing at the same time, with some satisfaction, that the bench had evidently been used for the same purpose before, since there was not a particle of dust upon it.

Insulated wires protruded from the back of the instrument, and attached to these were small thumbscrews.

With these he very readily made the connection, and then, after waiting a moment until he had determined in his mind what to say, he took down the receiver and vigorously turned the bell crank.

It was gratifying to him to hear the bell respond, for he knew by that, that the connection was established, and that he would speedily get a reply from the other end of the wire.

Nor was he mistaken.

He waited a considerable time, and was on the point of giving the crank another turn, when a voice at the other end of the wire called to him.

"Hello!" it said. "What is the matter now? I had gone to bed, Morris. What's up?"

Nick smiled with delight, for as distinctly as if the owner of the voice had been there in the cellar with him, he recognized the voice of Isaac Meadows.

But it was one thing to recognize the voice and quite another to determine where that voice proceeded from.

He had no means of telling whether the owner of the voice was one mile or ten miles away—that is, no means save one, which was that the wire was probably an isolated one, and was therefore probably not a very long one.

It had evidently been established in the house by the men who wished to use it, and was, without doubt, distinct and separate from any regular telephone service.

"If that is true," he mused, "it is not likely that this wire is more than half a mile, or at the most, a mile long."

Imitating as best he could the voice of Carruthers, he replied:

"Are you all right there?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?" came the reply.

"Because, in some manner, Nick Carter has got wind of where you are."

"The devil he has!"

"That's right. He has."

"What shall I do?"

"I think you had better leave there at once and come directly here."

"Go there? Where you are?"

"Yes; at once."

"But, confound it, Morris, that house is watched all the time. You told me that yourself."

"It isn't watched at this time of the night; and anyhow, that is the safest way."

"Nay, nay, Pauline! I don't see it that way."

"Well, then meet me outside somewhere."

"Where?"

"Anywhere you say."

"I think I'd rather wait here for you to come for me."

"And get scooped in by Carter in the meantime?"

"He'll be a dead Carter if he tries to get inside of this house while I am here. You know that."

"Yes; and that is precisely what I wish to avoid. There is enough against you now without adding the killing of Carter to the list."

The man at the other end of the phone laughed aloud.

"I think," he said, "that I would almost be willing to take my medicine, if I could first have the satisfaction of putting Carter out of the way."

"Bosh! All bosh! Now, say! Where will you meet me?"

"Right away?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll go down to Flynn's, if that will do. I ought to be there in half an hour."

Nick had not the least idea where Flynn's might be, but he felt sure that he could find the place without much difficulty, and so he replied at once:

"All right. At Flynn's——"

He paused abruptly, for at the other end of the wire he heard a door slam, and the noise was instantly followed by a loud voice exclaiming across the room evidently:

"Here! Drop that, you infernal fool! I am here, and the man at the other end of that wire is Nick Carter."

Then the telephone at the other end was shut off instantly, and Nick, who had recognized the voice of Carruthers as the person who had interrupted the conversation, sighed with genuine disappointment.

"If Carruthers had been fifteen minutes later," he mused, "I would have induced Meadows to meet me, and I would have nabbed him without a bit of trouble. As it is—well, I must wait, I suppose."

He still had the receiver at his ear, and was now on the point of dropping it, when he heard the instrument open again at the other end.

"Hello, Carter! Are you there still?" inquired the unmistakable voice of Carruthers, at the other end of the wire.

"Yes," replied Nick. "I'm here."

"Found anything?"

"This," said Nick.

"The telephone, you mean? Ah, yes. That was clever of you; it was, really. I say, Carter?"

"Well?"

"Have you found anything else?"

"Nothing worth mentioning, but I haven't begun to search yet."

"No? Then let me advise you to begin at once. You will discover the elixir of life, the seven sleepers and other treasures, if you only search long enough."

"I'll try," said Nick. "I'll try."

CHAPTER VI.

ENTOMBED IN A WELL HOLE.

The detective was on the point of leaving the phone when Carruthers spoke again.

"I say, Carter," he said.

"Well, what now?"

"Lucky that I turned back and came here before going downtown, wasn't it?"

"Yes; it was lucky for Meadows. He is well named Lucky Morgan."

"Meadows? Lucky Morgan? Who are they?"

"I recognized the voice, Carruthers."

"Did you? Really? Gee, Carter, but you are smart! Say!"

"Well?"

"Do you know he would have been just ass enough to have gone out and met you by appointment. What would happen to him if he didn't have me to look out for him?"

"I know what will happen to you if I get my hooks on you again."

"Do you, now? Really? What, for instance?"

"You'll see."

"All right. Say, Carter!"

"What?"

"How long do you think you will require the services of that house?"

"Oh, two or three hours. Why? Are you anxious to return?"

"Not particularly."

"Because if you are, I'll wait here for you."

"Oh, don't inconvenience yourself, I beg. I shan't want the house before to-morrow evening, you know. Now, really, haven't you found anything but that telephone?"

"Come over here and ask me, and I'll tell you."

"Thanks, awfully, dontcherknow. Adieu, my dear Carter. It pains me to leave you, but time presses, old man; time presses. It does, really. Adieu."

The receiver at the other end of the wire was put in place again, and so Nick dropped his own, and turned away.

The mocking voice of Carruthers still rang in his ears, and he still felt that indefinable presentiment that something was to happen before he left that house.

"I have searched the wall of the cellar," he mused, "but I have paid no attention to the cemented floor. I think I will now give a little attention to that. I am positive that I will discover something more here, if I search diligently; and search I will."

It must be remembered that he had only the small searchlight to aid him, and that at a distance of ten feet from the instrument itself, it cast a light not greater in circumference than the bottom of an ordinary pail.

However, the light was a brilliant one, and it was sufficient to discover to him anything it happened to touch.

He crossed to the front end of the cellar and from there began crossing and recrossing the width of it, so that as he proceeded not a square inch of the ground he passed over was left unexamined.

He had proceeded in this way until he was several feet to the rear of the center of the cellar floor, when the light fell upon an ordinary shingle which appeared to have been cast down there carelessly.

He had already occupied more than an hour in the search, and had discovered nothing for his pains, and he was beginning to think that he would find nothing, when the shingle appeared before him.

Anybody but Nick Carter might has passed over that shingle, but he had no thought of doing so, for it must be remembered that he was making a thorough search.

When the light discovered it to his view, he stuck out his foot and kicked it aside; and there, directly beneath it, imbedded in the floor, he saw a small iron ring.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "That ring is not there for nothing."

Bending closer, he examined the cellar bottom around it, and presently he could distinguish faint lines which formed a square around the ring—a square which would measure two feet in either direction; but so perfectly had the piece been fitted into the floor that had it not been for the ring he would not have noticed the lines at all.

"Now to see what is under this trapdoor," he muttered.

He seized hold of the iron ring and pulled, at first lightly, and then gradually increasing the strength he applied to it.

At first the door resisted his efforts, but presently he could feel that it was yielding, and then of a sudden it gave way and came up from the floor bodily.

He threw it aside and directed his light into the open space before him.

There was nothing but blackness at first; but after a moment's survey, he saw that the place was like a well hole—and it evidently at one time had been a well—and that there were stones, like steps, protruding from the sides.

Then he stretched out on the floor and directed his light straight down into the hole.

He almost uttered a cry of amazement and consternation when he did that, for the light from his search lantern rested full upon the upturned, dead face of Paul Lafont.

Paul Lafont, the central office shadow, had been murdered and cast into the well; and down in that part of it where the body had fallen the sides had at some time or other been hollowed out so that the well hole was shaped like a gourd, and the body readily lay at full length where it had fallen—or where it had been placed.

"I committed a sad error when I permitted Morris Carruthers to leave the house," mused the detective:

it I thought he would be more useful to me at liberty than in limbo. Poor Lafont. I reckon he failed turn in his report to the inspector to-night, but he been called off duty, poor chap. I must bring his ly out of that."

Without hesitation, and using the projecting stones fore referred to for steps, he made his way slowly p the well until at last he stood beside the corpse the bottom of the gourd-shaped excavation.

He discovered then that the well had been filled in that point, and that the hollowing-out process had n done for a purpose.

And that purpose was presently evident and manit, for there was a shallow gallery leading off from into the darkness.

For a moment he hesitated whether first to attend to body, by taking it to the cellar above, or to explore the passageway; and he finally decided upon the ter course.

"It will not hurt Lafont to lie where he is for a few ments longer," he mused. "He was shot through heart and died almost instantly. The body is already cold. I think, Mr. Morris Carruthers, that I e reason enough for arresting you now, if I should ppen to get another opportunity."

He turned then to the gallery under the cellar bottom, and entered it.

It was not possible to stand upright there, so he t on his hands and knees along a distance of thirty et or more, when his progress was stopped by a mass ebris, consisting of stones and dirt, with which the ay had been choked.

"This has been done lately; within a day or two," muttered to himself, for the earth, as well as the ne, was still damp, and in many ways bore evidence at it had lately been introduced into the well hole.

"Carruthers had made up his mind to abandon this ace when I surprised him here to-night. That is cer-in," mused the detective, "else he would not have ed up this hole, and used it also for a tomb for Lafont. Poor old Lafont! He must have entered the ll and observed Carruthers at work. He knew much, then, and Carruthers killed him. Well, there is nothing doing here. I may as well return to the cellar now."

The passageway was too narrow to permit of his turning around, and accordingly he backed out toward the entrance—toward the spot where the body of Lafont awaited him; and his body in the meantime so completely filled the aperture that he could neither see nor hear anything which might be taking place behind him.

As he reached the bottom of the gourd-shaped excavation, he perceived that another light than his own was shining there, and instantly he put out his own light.

Then, with a quick motion, he entered the more roomy place at the bottom of the gourd, and turning instantly, raised himself to an upright position.

But he as quickly dodged back again, for at the very instant that he raised himself to his feet some person at the top of the well fired five shots into it, one after another, in quick succession.

Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang! they came, as rapidly as one might count, and the place seemed filled with smoke and bullets all at once.

Fortunately for Nick, the shape of the well hole saved him from harm.

Standing back as he did, under the slanting walls of the dismal place, the bullets could not reach him, although by the thud which followed the last two, he knew that they at least had found refuge in the dead body of Paul Lafont.

Then, when the reports ceased, and the bullets stopped hailing down into the well, he heard the loud exultant laugh of Morris Carruthers.

"I wonder if I hit you, Carter?" he called. "Gee! but I never dreamed, when I have been planning how I would some day kill you, that I could have as sweet a revenge as this. Did you suppose that I had forgotten my brother, Livingstone, and that you were the cause of his death? I swore then that I would kill you some day. I say, Carter, did I hit you?"

Nick made no reply.

"What! You won't answer? Maybe you are dead or wounded, and then again, maybe you are not. I'll

the same, Carter, I'm not going to take any chances with you. You are too precious quick with those guns you carry up your sleeves.

"What! No answer yet? Well, all the same I'm not going to expose myself. I say, Carter, how do you like your quarters down there? Nice and cool, isn't it? Really, now?

"Ah? No answer? Well, never mind. I can talk to you for a moment, whether you are dead or alive, or only hurt a little. I want to tell you what you are up against. You'd like to know that, wouldn't you?

"Silent still, *mon cher ami*, Carter? Well, you see after I talked with you over the phone, it occurred to me that you would ferret out that well hole and that you would spend considerable time down there, so I thought I would pay you a little call while you were otherwise engaged. Nice of me, wasn't it? If you are alive, Carter, you'll starve to death down there, for I'm going to fasten this hole so that you can't get out of it, and then on top of that, I shall burn the house over your head. How does that strike you? Dear Carter! So sorry to part with you! I am, really. So young, so handsome, so engaging, so smart. Carter, it breaks my heart to leave you thus. It does, really! Good-by, Carter. When you get hungry and thirsty think of Livingstone Carruthers—and don't forget his brother Morris. Adieu, Carter. Peace be with thee! Adieu, dear friend, adieu."

Then the trapdoor clanged shut upon the detective.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK'S HERCULEAN LABOR.

For a moment after the door dropped shut over his head, Nick could hear nothing more; but presently there were noises of heavy objects being moved about the floor of the cellar, and he knew that Carruthers, and whoever was with him—probably Meadows—were engaged in piling obstructions upon the door in the cellar floor.

And he knew, moreover, that they would do it thoroughly.

He realized fully that there could be very little, if any, hope at all that he could make his escape in t direction, for he believed that Carruthers would ca out his threat and set fire to the house after he thoroughly sealed the entrance to the well hole aga all hope of the detective's being able to move it.

"Walk into my parlor, said the spider to the fl murmured the detective, with grim humor. "I tainly did walk into it all right to-night. I didn't d thing but give Carruthers every trump in the pack. I was fool enough to think that I could beat him w out any at all.

"Well, maybe the game isn't over yet. Who kno I don't propose to be bottled up in here if I can pre it, and I have been in tighter quarters than this be now.

"If the air will only hold good—if enough of it percolate through that fresh earth in the passa way to enable me to breathe. I think I can mak pretty good try at digging myself out of here so how; and, by the same token, as an Irishman w say, there is no time like the present.

"Poor old Lafont," he continued, after a pause, as touched the button of his light and cast the rays u the dead features of the professional shadow. "I w der if this is destined to become my tomb as well yours; eh?

"You can't answer, can you? Well, never m We won't give up the ship till the last plank s anyhow. Carruthers thinks he has got me. I wo if I can fool him? I'll try."

He glanced up once at the trapdoor over his he

All sounds had ceased from that quarter, and knew that Carruthers had finished his work and do less gone away; and he had no doubt that the build was already on fire.

"This is a pretty tight fit," he muttered. "Carru ers had good cause to congratulate himself on this ploit. The only wonder is that it never occurred me that he would return. Well, he did return, an have received the benefit of it. Now to work."

He divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, collar and his cuffs.

Then, having provided himself with the large c

e he carried in h s pocket, he crawled back through
in t tunnel to the po nt where he had been stopped by
I ca débris.
ne There he seated himself and studied it anxiously
agai in the aid of his light; and he shook his head in
nothing like despair as he viewed the task which he
e fi st undertake.
I "I can pull those stones away with my hands," he
t cl ded, "and must carry them, one or two at a time,
k. s to the well hole, for they would soon choke this
w sage behind me. I wonder how far it is to the other
e of that pile of earth and stones, and if it will be
ible for me to hold out, and do the work without
er.
"Well, I can't tell till I try, at all events."
He began work then with a will, first closing his
it ife and returning it to his pocket.
At first the work seemed comparatively easy.
The stones, roughly thrown into the place, came
so se in his hands without effort, and soon he had a
e pile of them around him; so huge, in fact, that
was obliged to cease work on the tunnel in order
carry the stones to the well hole.
To do that, he was obliged to back out and enter
in. more than a score of times; but at last the pas-
e was clear again, and once more he began work
in the tunnel.
There were stones of all shapes and sizes; some
were too large for him to lift, and others no larger
than an egg; and they ranged all the way between these
two sizes.
After another half hour of work, he had created a
small heap which he was obliged to remove as he
had done with the first, and still another half hour
was occupied in that manner.
Then, with the passageway clear a second time, he
went again upon the mass of dirt and stones in front
of him.
At the end of another hour, it seemed to him, as he
looked upon the impediment in his way, that he had
barely made an impression upon it, although back in
the well hole where he had carried the stones there
was a pile of them sufficient to have filled a large cart.

And now it became evident that he must begin to remove the dirt as well as the stones.

There was a mass of it, where it had fallen down as he carried the stones away, and that, like the heavier substance, must be carried back into the well and deposited there, in order that his passageway might not become choked.

The only receptacle he possessed, competent to convey the dirt, was his hat.

Fortunately it was a felt hat, and by turning the rim downward he increased its carrying capacity almost twofold.

His method was to fill the hat as full as it would hold by packing it firmly with both hands, then to back through the passage to the well hole, and empty it there; after that, to return and repeat the operation.

Time after time he did this.

After a while he ceased to count them; he only knew that he seemed to be traveling endlessly to and fro, always on his hands and knees, since it was impossible for him to stand upright in that shallow place.

His trousers and underclothing were already worn through, so that his bare knees came in direct contact with the earthen floor of the tunnel, but he paid no attention to that fact.

His sole thought was of liberty—of escape from that terrible place.

As he worked, he could imagine the house over his head going up in flames. In imagination he witnessed the arrival of the firemen, all too late to save the dwelling, which had doubtless been well saturated with oil before the fire was put to it.

In fancy he could see the roof fall in; the walls topple and totter before they crashed into the blazing furnace beneath, and he could not help wondering what those same firemen would think, and what they would do, could they imagine that a human being—Nick Carter, in fact—was imprisoned in a narrow well hole underneath the cellar of that blazing pile.

He had been at work many hours—he did not know how many.

Already the well hole was becoming choked with the mass of stones and dirt he had conveyed thither.

But he did not throw the stones and dirt he carried there in a reckless fashion about the place.

He worked on a system.

The stones he piled neatly and compactly around the sides of the gourd-shaped place, and the dirt he deposited, as far as possible, behind the stones, filling every crevice where it would lodge, and when the interstices were filled so that they would hold no more, and he was compelled to pile the dirt outside the stones, he stamped upon it with his feet, and so packed it tightly.

He had no means of knowing how much of it there might be, and room was a precious asset in his calculations just then.

His face and hands were grimy with the dirt. His trousers and drawers were worn through at the knees. His hair was matted on his head. His knees, his hands and his fingers were bleeding from many a cut and bruise; but still he worked on undaunted.

When he had been at work steadily for several hours, and had reached a point where he was almost dead with fatigue, he stopped to rest and to consider.

He realized that the air was growing heavy, and he feared that the moment was not far off when it would fail him, and he would be compelled to cease his labors for the want of it.

He understood perfectly well that he could not have worked as long as he had done, if it had not been for the fact that the earth with which the tunnel was clogged had been freshly placed there, and was therefore not only aerated, but was so loosely thrown in that considerable air succeeded in working its way through to the place where he was at work.

But this could not continue indefinitely.

He realized that he was consuming more than the supply, and that there was not now much more time to spare ere it would fail him, and he would be forced to stop work from sheer inability to breathe.

And still, he felt that if he succeeded at all, he must rest.

"If I only had an iron bar," he thought. "Who could imagine the value that a simple iron bar might become under circumstances such as these? That old well hole will be so full presently that I won't be able to get another thing in there. All right. It won't be full till it is full, and I'm not going to borrow trouble. I've got troubles enough ready to hand, without manufacturing any, I reckon.

"Let me see. If I had a full glass of good cold water, what would I be willing to pay for it just at this moment? I'd run the price up among a high figure point, if there happened to be anybody bidding against me; that's sure.

"Hey-dey! Let's to work, Nick, and keep our courage up. I mustn't forget that I have been in worse places than this before now—though not much worse, I'll be bound."

He threw the light of his search lantern against the mass before him.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "There's a pile of stones beyond this heap of dirt, which looks as if it had been carefully placed there by hand. If that is so, I must be somewhere near the other end of this obstacle. To work, Nick, old man! To work!"

With renewed vigor he attacked the mass again. The rest had done him good, and having cleared away some of the dirt from the stones he had discovered and remarked upon—having cleared it away and thrown it behind him without pausing to carry it back to the well hole—he suddenly fancied that he was breathing with more ease and regularity.

"Upon my soul, I believe there is air coming through the opening between those stones!" he muttered. "If that is so, I am near the end of this business."

The thought gave him renewed hope, and he worked with a vim he had not employed since he commenced the task, nor did he pause to carry back to the well hole anything which he took away, for the well hole was almost full, and he felt now that he must speedily find a way out or resign himself to die where he was.

At last he reached the stones he had discovered which seemed to have been carefully piled by hand, and crawling up close to them, he placed his back against the pile.

Then, applying all his strength, he pushed against
mass before him.

For a moment only it resisted his efforts. Then it
began to give way, and suddenly, with a suddenness
which threw him off his balance, the whole mass fell
away before him.

CHAPTER VIII.

VOICES IN THE FRONT ROOM.

Strong as Nick Carter was, as powerful as his readers know him to be, and gifted with all the endurance that God gives to human beings, he was near to fainting with exhaustion at the moment when that pile of stones gave way before the pressure he applied to it, and fell outward, away from him, into a space beyond.

It was not far from midnight when Carruthers shut the trapdoor over his head, and thus entombed him in the well hole; and now, with the rush of cold air in his face, and the assurance that the way to liberty was before him even though it had not yet been attained, when he removed his watch from his fob pocket and turned the light upon it, he was appalled to see that he had labored unceasingly for seven hours.

Seven hours!

The time seemed more like seven years to him, as he stretched himself, panting upon the ground, and drank in deep draughts of that life-giving air, which in a way was almost as refreshing as water would have been.

During all the time he had labored he had kept his hat and waistcoat near at hand, for he knew that he would need them if he found the way to escape.

Now, after a moment of rest, he rose again to his hands and knees, and with these articles in his grasp, crawled over the pile of stones and dirt into the space beyond.

He was still in darkness; still in the depths of the tunnel; but the air was good and wholesome where he and himself, and he felt that the way to liberty was open somewhere at the other end of the passage.

As he went forward the passageway became higher, and presently he was enabled to stand upright.

His throat and lips were still parched for the want of water, but he felt that it would not be long now before he could obtain some, and so he pressed onward through the tunnel.

He recalled then the topography of the locality where the house of Carruthers stood.

He remembered that it was on the side of a hill, and that to the north of it, four or five hundred feet away, stood its counterpart—that is, another house almost exactly like it.

He knew, by the turns he had made since he passed the heap of stones, that he was traveling northward, and it suddenly came to him that that other house had been the domicile of Isaac Meadows.

As that idea suggested itself to him another came with it, and he stopped abruptly and with the aid of the light examined the earthen roof over his head.

There, sure enough, he discovered an insulated wire, stretching along past him through the darkness.

"The telephone wire," he muttered. "This tunnel leads to that other house as sure as I'm alive at this moment."

And then he halted again, with even more abruptness.

"I wonder," he said, aloud—"I wonder if by any chance they have stopped up the other end of this tunnel, as they did this end? I wonder if I have got all that work to do a second time?"

Then he shook his head.

"No, that cannot be," he thought, "for, if that was so, all this good, wholesome air would not be here for me to breathe. Anyhow, I'll soon know, for if I am any judge of distance, I cannot be very far from that house at the present moment."

After that he kept steadily on his way without pausing, and at last he came to a halt before a stout oaken door, built into the sides of the tunnel, and held in place by cemented stones.

The door was locked, but there was a keyhole, and Nick Carter had often said that he never saw the keyhole he couldn't get through; meaning that with his pick-lock he could master any and all of them.

He proved the truth of his assertion in this instance, for it scarcely required a minute for him to shoot back

the bolt of the lock, to open the door and to pass through and close it after him.

His light showed him that he had entered another cellar, this time through the side of it, and not through a trapdoor in the flooring.

What surprised him still more, was the fact that apparently no effort had been made to conceal the existence of the door from observation.

It stood there, plainly in view of any person who might enter there—a stout, oaken door, made with many nails and braces—made evidently to resist attack.

He looked at his watch again.

"Half-past seven o'clock," he mused. "It is time that the people above me were astir, if there are people there, which I doubt. Anyhow, I'll soon find out.'

He found the stairs without difficulty, and mounted them.

The door at the top was not bolted, and opening it cautiously, he stepped through into the basement of the house.

All was dark and silent.

He listened intently, but not a sound of any kind came to him, and a glance around the basement convinced him that the house was untenanted. There was not an article of furniture to be seen, and even the range had been dismantled.

"I remember now," he thought, "that this house is almost a ruin. Undoubtedly it is where Isaac Meadows has been hiding, and Carruthers, by never once coming near the house, has of course never attracted attention to it. Meadows might have remained here till he rotted, and with perfect safety so far as the police are concerned, for they certainly never would have thought of looking here for him."

Nevertheless, although he was convinced in his own mind that there was nobody in the building, he did not relax his caution.

"It is possible," he told himself, "that Carruthers and Meadows, feeling perfectly secure in the thought that I could not escape from the well hole, may have returned here; but whatever the cost, I must have a drink of water, and that at once."

He crossed to the sink and cautiously turned on the water—turned it on gradually and slowly, so that it would run without noise, and then, with patience born of many a hard experience, he waited till it ran cool.

There was an old cup on the shelf in front of him, and this he washed with great care, after which he filled it, applied it to his lips and drank slowly.

"Was ever anything in this world so sweet as that?" he asked himself, mentally.

A second cupful, which he also swallowed slowly, was all that he required, and now, greatly refreshed and almost himself again, save that his muscles were tired and sore from his late exertions, he made his way through the basement toward the stairs.

He ascended these with exceeding care, taking pains to place his feet close to the balustrade in order that there might be no creaking sound to betray him.

And so he arrived at the top, which was the parlor floor.

He had released the button of his searchlight, so that he was in utter darkness, but he recalled perfectly the plan of the other house, and he did not doubt that this one was exactly its counterpart, since they were both exactly alike on the outside; and in this he was not mistaken.

He paused at the head of the stairs to listen.

His feet, treading upon bare boards, told him that there were no carpets on the floors, and that doubtless there was no furniture in the house at all, save, perhaps, in the room which had been occupied by Isaac Meadows during his period of hiding.

Feeling his way cautiously, for he did not yet deem it wise to use his light, and the tightly boarded windows excluded all daylight from the premises, he made his way around the stairs to the front of the house and began slowly to ascend the stairs to the second floor.

"I'll go to the top and work down," was his thought. "Then, if anything happens, I'll at least have the advantage of position."

But fate had not willed that he should be obliged to ascend to the top of the house.

He had arrived at the landing on the second floor

d was in the act of passing the door which com-nicated with the front, or alcove room, when he me to a sudden stop, listening.

He waited a moment, and then took a step nearer to e door, placing his ear against it.

No, he had not been mistaken. He could plainly ar the low murmur of voices from the opposite side the door, but the murmur was so low that he could even distinguish whether they proceeded from men women—whether they were masculine or feminine.

For a moment he was not sure that there was more n one voice, but after a moment of listening, he be-me convinced that there were two persons inside the om, and that they were conversing almost in whis-ra.

"When you can't get across, go around," he thought, h a grim smile; and he turned away from the door, d made his way back through the hall toward the r room.

At that door he paused again and listened, and at convinced that there was no one in that room, he wly turned the knob, pressing down upon it strongly he did so.

The door yielded. It was not locked, and in a mo-nt more he had pushed it open before him and ssed the threshold.

He knew that there were, or should be, connecting rs between the front and the back rooms, but in utter darkness of the hall, he had forgotten that re already daylight outside.

The windows of the room he entered now were not carefully boarded as were those in the lower part the house.

Enough of the covering had been torn away to per-considerable light to enter; illumination, it seemed Nick, after his long immersion in total blackness. If one had stepped into that room from the sunlight the street, one might have found it difficult to see ere it: but entering it from such blackness as had veloped Nick Carter since his imprisonment in the ll it be, it seemed almost brilliant with light.

A glance told him that he had guessed aright; that re were connecting doors between the two rooms, and the louder murmur of voices coming to his ears told him, moreover, that the door, if not open, was at least ajar.

"Good!" he thought. "If that happens to be Carruthers and Meadows, there will be something doing here, presently. I'm a little tired, but I shouldn't wonder if I could put up a good-sized scrap for those fellows, at that."

He turned then, and as carefully as he had opened the door from the hallway, he closed it again.

Then, feeling to see that his weapons were ready for use, he started toward the connecting door.

CHAPTER IX.

BEARDING THE LION.

There was a passageway between the two rooms, or, rather, to be more exact, there were two lavatories, with a sliding door between them, so that there was a space of approximately six feet between either room and that middle door.

The door itself was halfway open, and as Nick approached it, he could distinguish the voices from the other side more plainly with every step he made.

He knew definitely now, that the voices proceeded from men, but as yet he was unable to distinguish words, or even to recognize the voices themselves.

The door which has already been described as half open, was before him.

He studied the aperture carefully, and at length decided that, with great care, he might manage to squeeze through the opening without making a noise, and as he was resolved at whatever cost to know who was there and what they were talking about, he lost no time in carrying his idea into effect.

Buttoning his coat tightly around him, he stretched himself to his full height, and so made himself as small as possible. Then he approached the opening sidewise, and, inch by inch, lest the buttons of his coat should rattle against the door and thus betray him, he edged his way through until at last he stood free and

clear on the opposite side; and that, without having made the slightest sound to betray his presence.

The front room was even lighter than the one he had left. In the passageway where he stood, it was quite dark. Still, he hesitated to attempt to peer into the room, lest the faces of the men should be turned in that direction, and he should be discovered.

Now, however, he could hear quite distinctly, and a moment of listening told him that he was not only in the presence of both Carruthers and Meadows, but that they were discussing their plans for the future quite freely.

Just at that particular moment, when he first overheard them, his own name was mentioned, and it was Meadows who spoke first.

"I wish I knew positively that Nick Carter is dead," he said.

Carruthers laughed—or, rather, he chuckled.

"If he isn't dead by this time, you can bank upon it that he will be, in a few hours from now."

"All the same I would like to be quite positive."

"Positive! Do you suppose he can live down there, even if none of my bullets struck him? What is he going to do without water to drink, without food to eat, and without air to breathe, I would like to know?"

"Granted, Morris. All the same, I'd give a cold thousand to have a look at his corpse."

"Well, if you care to go and dig through all those hot ashes and open the trapdoor in the cellar, you might have a look at it. It's there."

"I'd like to know that it is there."

"How in the name of thunder do you expect it's going to get out?"

"I don't expect it. I only fear that he may escape."

"Well, he can't do it."

"He might dig through that mass of earth and stones in the tunnel, and so find his way directly to this very house."

"Meadows, are you losing your nerve?"

"I hope not. Sometimes I think I am."

"Well, let me tell you this. If Nick Carter had me to deal with him for the work, he couldn't dig through that tunnel in a week. Are you satisfied now?"

"I'll try to be."

"Then let's get back to business."

"I thought we had settled it."

"Not quite. You may be obliged to leave the country, but I am not, and I don't want to go just yet. I stay here and sort of keep tabs on things in general."

"Suppose they should happen to dig under this house, into the well hole, and find the bodies there, what then?"

"Suppose the devil! What do you want to suppose a thing like that for?"

"Well, it might happen."

"It won't happen."

"Suppose it should," insisted Meadows. "The inspector would light on you in a holy minute."

"Oh, well, I'll take my chances on that point; and besides, I shall keep an eye on the old house. If I see any signs of excavating, I'll light out."

"It is my opinion that the inspector will look you up anyhow."

"Why? What for?"

"Lafont won't show up. He'll naturally be curious to know what has become of him."

"Naturally."

"And he will probably send for you and ask you this question."

"What of that? I shall simply tell him that I don't know. That will settle it. I'm a match for the inspector any day."

"Maybe, Morris, he's sharper than you think."

"Bosh!"

"And knows more than you think."

"Rats! Gee, Ike, but I wish you would get back your nerve. You used to have as much as anybody, but lately you seem to have lost it all."

"Things have moved rather too swift for me lately, I'm afraid."

"You didn't flunk when you hit the watchman and laid him out. You didn't flunk when I shot Lafont; you put a second bullet into him to make sure. You didn't flunk when you went to the bank for that fifty-five; you were as cool as a cucumber—cooler than I was."

"I had my nerve with me that morning."

"You're right you did. I wish you had it with you now."

"I'll get it back again, all right, as soon as I get out of this cursed town."

"Do you think that Mexico will suit you any better?"

"I hope it will. I only wish you would consent to go with me."

"There you go again. Haven't I told you that I don't go—now? I'm going to stay here and see if Carter comes to life. By the powers, Med, you should have seen that snap shot he made. I thought I had him dead to rights; was sure of it, in fact, and was just going to fall on him like a thousand of brick, when zip! he knocked the pistol clean out of my hand, and away across the room, and it numbed my arm as if he had hit the pistol with a hammer."

"I have heard that he is a great shot."

"Great shot! Well, I should say so! He didn't use a thing in his hand, and where the pistol came from that he used, or where it went to after he had used it, is more than I can tell."

"Up his sleeve, probably."

"Sure! But how, and when? I'll swear that I didn't see it. I only felt it."

"Took the ginger out of you, didn't it, Morris?"

"Almost. It flabbergasted me all right, if you know what that means. Now, Med, let's get back to business."

"All right. I'm willing."

"The *Orizaba* sails from the foot of Wall Street at three this afternoon. You must sail with her. This town is too hot to hold you just now, and you know it; and what is more to the point, I can't be pestered and bothered, getting things to you to eat and drink, now that the other place is burned down, and the tamale is closed."

"I have already agreed to go; what more do you want?"

"I want you to leave twenty-five out of that fifty-thousand with me. I need it in my business; see?"

"Well, I've consented to do that, also. Now what else?"

"I've got plenty of things here to disguise you, all right. We'll get to work presently, and make you up in a style that would fool Nick Carter himself."

"Damn Nick Carter!"

"With all my heart, old man. Now, we must time ourselves so that you will arrive at the pier from which the *Orizaba* sails, just before the time for her to cast off. You will go onto the pier alone, and you will go directly aboard of the steamer. It will be time enough to pay your passage when the steward comes around to assign you to a seat at the table."

"Sure."

"You can tell him that you were so late in getting to the pier that you did not have time to buy a ticket; just made up your mind to go, at the last moment, and all that. I say, Med, you might hit up a paying game of cards on the way down."

"I don't feel to-day as if I could win with a straight flush in my hand."

"Gee! What a funk you are in, aren't you? Now, where is the cash? We might as well count it out now and have it settled."

"You're in a hurry, aren't you?"

"No; but I'm ready; aren't you?"

"Yes; get it."

"Where is it?"

"In the bureau, yonder; in the top drawer, wrapped up in brown paper."

"Shall I get it."

"Yes, if you like. We might as well have it over with, I suppose."

"Look here, Med, you know that I am doing the square thing by you. I'm only taking what you, yourself, proposed. And, besides, when you get to Mexico, your thirty thousand will swell to sixty in a minute."

"I'm not kicking, Morris. Go ahead. Count out your own share of the cash. I'll give you ten more if you will go to Mexico with me."

"Not yet, Med. I'll join you there later, according to promise; but I won't go now. That's settled."

"All right. Get the cash and count it. I won't urge you any more."

Carruthers left his seat and started toward the bureau, which was on the opposite side of the room, and, as he did so, Nick Carter gathered himself for the struggle which he was now resolved must come.

Then, as Carruthers reached the middle of the floor, the detective stepped out from his place of concealment, and confronted him.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said. "I'm sorry to interrupt you. I am, really."

CHAPTER X.

THE DEVIL IN HIS EYE.

It was a boast of Carruthers', as it had been of his brother's, long ago, that he was never taken off his guard, but for once in his life this assertion on his part was a fallacy.

When he discovered Nick Carter standing before him, and saw in his hands two revolvers, one of which was aimed at his own head, and the other covering Meadows, who had not left his seat, he uttered a loud cry and started back almost as if a bullet had already struck him.

It may be that the detective's personal appearance had something to do with his fright; it is possible, even, that for a brief instant he thought it might be a ghost which stood before him, although it was a very black and dirty ghost.

Nick Carter was covered with soil and grime from his head to his feet His face was black with it; his hair was matted with it; his hands were grimed with it until all vestige of the natural hue of his skin had departed.

His coat, it is true, was not in so bad a condition as the rest of his clothing, but even that, from being dragged along the ground through the tunnel, was by no means immaculate.

His trousers were a sight!

The knees were entirely worn away from them, and from waistband to bottom they were exactly of the color of the earth through which he had toiled and labored so ceaselessly and so painfully.

There was blood upon his hands, too, where he had torn them on the rocks he had removed; and there were streaks of blood on his face, where he had brushed the perspiration away with his wounded hands.

Altogether, as he stood there before the two criminals, with his unerring revolvers aimed at them, he did not look inviting; and the outlook for the two men confronted, did not appear promising.

But if Carruthers was nonplused and frighte for an instant, he quickly recovered himself, and all matchless insolence returned after that first cry of c sternation.

"Upon my life, it's Carter!" he exclaimed, exa as he might have said it had he really been deligh by the encounter. "Carter, my dear fellow, how you?"

"Ugly!" replied Nick, laconically.

"Are you? Really? Now wouldn't that jar y And that, too, after all the pains I took to care you so snugly."

"Drop it, Carruthers!" said Nick, sharply. your hands up over your head, or I'll bore you. you, too, Meadows."

Both men complied without a remonstrance, for t realized that they were indeed dealing with a man would stand no more fooling.

"Really, Carter," drawled Carruthers, as he r his hands in compliance with the order, "this is a n uncomfortable position, dontcherknow."

Nick grinned through the dirt on his face.

"I'll make you a whole lot more uncomfortable t you are now, if you attempt to take them down," said. "Thought you had me buried, along with y victim, poor old Lafont, didn't you?"

"As sure as you're born, Carter, I really thoug had. I apologize, I'm sure."

"Well, you see that I am very much alive, notw standing your assurances to your friend that I dead."

"Indeed, I do. I'm dreadfully sorry, too. really. How did you get out?"

"Dug out."

"Really? How surprising!"

"Nice little arrangement, that tunnel of yours, w it? Only you filled it up a little too soon."

"Yes; it was convenient. I wish now that I made the filling a little stronger."

"No doubt."

"I say, Carter, do you mind if I take hold of chandelier? It will sustain my hands, and I'm de uncomfortable. I am, really."

"If you move, Carruthers, I'll shoot you witho slightest compunction. Do you understand that?"

"Why, yes; it appears quite plain."

"Well, I mean it. You are going to have no consideration whatever from me, and you are not going to have a chance to make any break for liberty, so don't bother yourself thinking about it."

"I'm sure, old chap, it is quite too considerate of you to relieve my mind on that score. I was just considering how it might be done."

"Try it and you will see how it is done."

"H'm! Can you shoot as well with those pistols as with the others?"

"Quite. Meadows!"

"Well, what?" replied Meadows, sulkily.

"Have you got a gun in your pocket?"

"Two of them, if you want to know. I only wish I could get at them and have a try at you, you——"

"That will do. We won't call names at this meeting."

"By no means," put in Carruthers. "Let us be harmonious, if nothing else."

"Now, Meadows," said Nick, "in which pockets are your guns?"

"One is in my right hip pocket; the other is inside my vest."

"Very good. Stand up and back over here to me."

"What for?"

"Do as I tell you and don't ask questions. I want those guns. Don't take your hands down an inch, or I'll send a bullet through you. That's right. Now back over here to me."

Meadows obeyed because it was the only thing he could do, and when he was sufficiently close to the detective, Nick reached down one hand and took the weapon from his hip pocket.

"So far, so good," he said. "Now, on which side of your waistcoat is the other gun?"

"On the right side."

"Very well; lower your left hand and reach in there and get it. Hand it to me, butt first, over your shoulder. If you attempt any monkey tricks, you'll get hurt. You understand that, don't you?"

"I think I ought to by this time."

"So you should; but you are mighty stupid about some things. That's it. Thank you. Now, have you any other weapons about you?"

"No, I haven't."

"Very good. Carruthers, you appear to be growing lonesome. My eye is on you, and I have the bullets ready if you make any breaks, so don't try it."

"Really, Carter," replied Carruthers, "you offend me; you do, really. I have penetration and understanding, and I quite comprehend the situation. I think, though, that I could bear it better if you had taken the trouble to wash your face before you interrupted us."

"Shut up, now, while I talk with Meadows," said Nick.

Then he felt in one of his pockets and presently produced a pair of steel handcuffs which he dangled over the shoulders of the man who stood with his back to him.

"Do you know what those are, Meadows?" he asked.

"Does he!" laughed Carruthers. "Why, they're old friends of his."

"Take them in your hands, Meadows," ordered Nick, paying no attention to Carruthers. "They are both open, as you will see. Now, I want you to bend forward and lock them around your ankles; and I want you to lock them, mind. I can tell by the click whether you obey me or not."

"I'll be cursed if I do," growled Meadows.

"If you don't, I'll rap you on the head with the butt of this pistol, and do it myself, later, when I have done with Carruthers. You'd better do as I say."

Meadows bent forward and snapped one of the bracelets on one ankle.

"That's it," said Nick. "Now for the other. Good! That's right. I fancy you would experience some difficulty in running away now."

He felt in his pocket again and produced a second pair.

"Now put your hands behind you, and put your wrists close together," he ordered. "I can adjust these with one hand while I keep Carruthers covered with the other. So. Now the other wrist. A little closer together, if you please. Good!"

Meadows was now standing before the detective, with his back toward him and with his hands bound together behind his back, and his feet manacled so that he could not have taken a step more than six inches in length.

Nick regarded him for an instant, with a smile, and then he gave him a push, so that he toppled helplessly over on the floor in a heap; and the storm of curses that arose from him when he fell was something awful to hear.

"That settles your hash," said Nick. "Now, Carruthers, it is your turn."

"Mine? Really? How considerate! What can I do for you, Carter?"

"You can stand just as you are without moving a hair while I go around behind you. Do you want a rap on the back of the head with the butt of this pistol?"

"I'm not hankering after it, thank you."

"Then mind what I say."

"Sure to, old chap. Cawn't help it, you know."

Nick, having passed behind him, produced a third pair of handcuffs.

"Now, Carruthers," he said, "lower your left hand, and swing it behind you as you do so. Do just exactly as I say, for I am not in a mood for fooling."

Carruthers complied.

"Will that do?" he asked.

"Excellently," replied Nick, as he snapped one handcuff into place. "Now, the other hand in the same manner. So. That is right. Are they more comfortable, shackled behind your back, than they were up there near the ceiling?"

"Infinitely so, thank you, Carter. Really, you are too kind."

"And now, Carruthers, attend to what I am about to say."

"I'm all attention, dear sir."

"I have still one more pair. They will be rather a tight fit for your ankles, but I think they will answer."

"Don't apologize, I beg of you."

"I'm going to stoop over, and with one hand lock one of these on one of your ankles. I know something about your strength and agility, and I don't want you to get any foolish notion in your head that you can kick out backward and knock me over, or otherwise give yourself an opportunity for a scrap. Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly, oh, sage of Mulberry Street. I never knew before that you were a mind-reader."

"If you try any such dodge, you'll get a bullet through the middle of your back."

"I'd rather have the shackles, thank you."

Nick watched his man narrowly while he fastened the bracelet on one of his ankles; but Carruthers wisely made no attempt to resist the operation. It was evident that he understood, from Nick Carter's manner, that he would do exactly as he promised, in case of emergency.

"Now," said Nick, "before I fasten the other o I wish to repeat the same warning. Are you read

"Quite ready, Carter."

"Then place your feet as close together as you get them. So. That will do. Now, remember."

Still with the revolver pointed at Carruthers' h Nick bent forward, and, in a twinkling of the eye, tened the last iron upon Carruthers' ankles.

"Good!" he said. "I don't think you are stro enough to break those, and you had better not make effort."

"I won't. Don't worry. I know when I'm cau as well as the next one. I saw the devil in your e Carter, and I knew better than to resist you. would have killed me without a thought."

"You are right I would. Now, how many guns things have you got about you?"

"Really, I haven't counted them. Two or three.

Nick felt around his pockets and found three.

"Now, Carruthers," he said, "shall I push you o as I did Meadows, or will you do the hoptoad act get into one of those chairs?"

"I'll play toad if it's all the same to you;" and did so.

Nick regarded both men for a moment, smiling.

"This is a fairly good night's work after all," said. "I've got you both, and I have got the mo also;" and he went to the bureau and removed brown paper package which Meadows had describe

Presently he went to one of the front windows, a having raised it, knocked off one of the boards w which it had been covered on the outside.

He had no difficulty in attracting the attention o man in the street, and soon there was a message headquarters, calling for the assistance he needed.

THE END.

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